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ABSTRACT

The notion of "textual norms" refers to sociocultural conventions that define the "well-formedness" of a text. Because well-formedness in texts is characterized by convention, different conventions may exist in a community and lead to norm conflicts when used in actual text generation. In this article, two types of norm conflict are described. In the first, there is a lack of a conventionalized norm system that leads to change in the norm system by a functionality principle (i.e., the normal system is viewed as a means not an end). In the second conflict, the goal and communicative function can be interpreted in different ways, and the norm system can be changed only according to a regulativity principle (i.e., an act of authority). (JP)

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Conflicts and changes in textual norms

KJELL LARS BERGE

Abstract

The notion of 'textual norms' refers to socio-cultural conventions which prescribe how a text may be structured if it is to be accepted as 'well-formed'. Since well-formedness in texts is characterized by convention, different conventions may exist in a community, and they may lead to norm conflicts when used in actual text generation. In this article two examples of such norm conflicts are presented, and the consequences of the norm conflicts for the formal structure of these texts are illustrated. The two norm conflicts are also seen as examples of situations which may cause changes in norm systems.

1. Textual norms

The notion of "textual norms" (Berge, 1990) refers to socio-cultural conventions which define the "well-formedness" of a text. Such norms prescribe how a text should be structured if it is to be accepted as a "well-formed" text in a certain community, and in specific situations and types of situation in that communicative community.

2. Socio-textology

The study of textual norms is often ignored in modern textology, or substituted by the rather abstract and/or psychologically coined notions of "relevance", "acceptability", "situationality", etc. (de Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981). A shift away from these notions towards the notion of "norm" implies a shift from a cognitive and psychological approach to text studies to a sociological and semiotic approach. Textuality can then be studied as a cultural convention. In the words of Jan Mukarovsky (1970), one can classify norms both "as a fact of the so-called collective awareness", and "as a historical fact". I would prefer to name this approach to text-studies *socio-textology*.

3. The contrastive perspective

The socio-textological approach allows a *contrastive* perspective. One can study different textuality conventions in different cultures.

With this approach it should also be possible to study conflicts between different textual norm systems in a certain culture and in certain communicative situations in

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that culture. And it should in fact be possible to study how and why textual norms change, as a possible result of constant and insoluvable norm conflicts.

4. The system of functions

The variable of the textual system that I consider the most relevant in this contrastive approach is most distinctively located in the global level of a textual system, more specifically in the formal part of the global system, i.e. that structure which constitutes a *whole* of the different sememes in a text, by means of *functions* (as defined by Hjelmslev, 1976). I prefer to call this system *the functional system*.

5. Social field, communicative functions, and textual norms

So what do textual norms do? From my point of view the most important task for a norm system is to produce tokens or utterance texts that are the *means* whereby a specific *goal* in a specific situation is reached. A situation here is defined in terms of a *social field* (Bourdieu, 1986). A social field is defined as a scene where the communicators are striving towards a specific goal. The goal is symbolic capital, for instance the right to decide what a goal-adequate text is.

This goal is socially accepted and conventionalised, and so is the *communicative function* which relates the textual norm system to the goal. The norm system then prescribes both the communicative function and how the text tokens of the system should *normally be structured*, if the desired goal is to be attained.

What is implied here is the hypothesis that there exists *an internal, non-contingent causal relation* between the normalised communicative goal *G* in the social field *S*, the communicative functions *F* which are normalised to reach G in S, and those textual function structures *T* which are normalised as the means of F to reach G in S. These textual norms constitute the utterance text as a grammatically and semantically coherent text. This proposed causal relation can be expressed in the following way:

Figure 1.

$\underline{G_S \rightarrow F_S \rightarrow T_S}$

The causal relation shown here is of course an idealisation. For the relation to exist it is necessary that the goal and the function are static. And this is seldom the case.

Still, with this simple model it is possible to focus on conflicting conventions of textuality.

6. Two types of norm conflict

I am going to describe two types of norm conflict. In both these types I will show how the communicators typically solve the norm conflict in their utterances.

The first situation (6.1) is characterised by the fact that a completely new social field is constituted. And in this way new goals and functions are developed. The problem is then: how should texts be structured in order to effectively reach the goal? What we are witnessing in this type of situation is the mingling of older and dysfunctional norms, a situation where there is not as yet a conventionalised norm system.

The second situation (6.2) is typical of a situation where the goal and the communicative function can be interpreted in different ways, due to an uncertainty which is typical of the social field. The communicators are then in a way "free" to choose different ways of structuring the texts, depending on the interpretation chosen.

In both these situations there is a variation in how the utterances should be structured.

6.1. Example 1: New norms for a new type of social field?

In the first situation, where a completely new social field is constituted, the background is as follows: In 1771 the king of Denmark-Norway - or rather his prime minister - signed an act which abolished all forms of censorship on written and printed literature. Overnight a new type of social field was created, the so-called "public opinion". The capital that the communicators fought for in this social field was to receive "attention" for a specific cause from the absolute power, i.e. the king. The goal, then, was to influence the addressee - the king - so that he acted in favour of the addresser.

The communicative function in the field, then, can be defined as a certain type of *directive*. These directives were of an *appealing* type. In this way the relationship between addresser and addressee was inverted, since the addresser was subordinate in relation to the addressee. To receive attention from the king the addresser also had to gain acceptance of his version of reality in a *declaration*. This suspension of the king's prerogative right to define reality was one of the most revolutionary results of the act.

How should one express oneself in such a field? Older norm systems internalised by individuals who wanted to act on the scene of public opinion, and which were used in situations like this one, had suddenly become dysfunctional. The system could not produce utterances that could effectively reach the new goal: to obtain power by means of short written texts.

The utterance text which I have analysed (Berge, 1991) - "A dialogue between Einar Jermonsön and Reiar Randulvsön from Opland in the county of Aggerhuus in Norway" - is a political pamphlet which is quite typical of this situation. It was presumably written by some peasants in Norway. Even if we do not know its real author, the content of the text is representative of the peasants' interests. Besides, it is not written in Danish, but in a local Norwegian dialect. However, the lexico-grammatical structure is not pure. There is a considerable amount of interference. This interference is systematically related to the formal structure of the text.

The central problem in this new social field was that one had to invent new ways of expressing oneself in the written form. One could say that the quite radical use of a Norwegian dialect is an indication of normative change. If we study the formal structure of the text, we will find the same variation at the textual level. A superficial analysis of the linear aspect of the functional structure gives us this picture:

Figure 2.

Linear macrofunctions	**Hierarchical and other linear functions/ Content**
Introduction	1. The theme *T* is *presented* and *specified* in *T1, T2, T3* from perspective *P* (E1-E15)
Main part	2. P of T is changed to *P'* due to a *mythical argument* (R16-R29)
	3. New version of T: *T'* (R30-R34)
	4. *Descriptions* of certain facts from P' Proposals to the addressee: *T'1, T'2* (R35-E247)
Final part	5. Final proposal to the addressee: *T'3* *Moral* (E248-E257)

Legend: E= Einar speaking
R= Reiar speaking
1-257 = syntagmatic units

In Figure 2 the linear functional structure is illustrated in a rather naive way. I have used rather intuitive functional notions such as "presentation", "specification" "mythical argument", "description" to show the different functions of the content or theme.

But the formal structure of the text is more complicated than this simple model shows. The text has two properties which are not shown in this kind of model. Firstly, its *dialogical* structure. Secondly, its *layered* structure.

The dialogical structure is typical of the norm system that was used in the period. Dialogue is a genre that was extremely frequent in more popular political texts until the middle of the 19th century. Why? My hypothesis is that dialogue is a formal technique which couples the abstract with the concrete. A sort of instinctive concretisation of dialectics. At the textual level the use of dialogue means that the thematic turn-taking can be located to the different participants. And it is possible to locate the correct perspective to one of them. The addressee takes the role of the uninformed participant. In this way the dialogue functions as a didactic genre. The use of dialogue then indicates that the more abstract argumentative texts that we use today are a historical product, which demands a certain learning process which our author and/or his addressees had not gone through.

The other characteristic aspect of the text is its layered structure. The different layers of the texts are in fact different texts integrated in one overall structure. A text with a layered structure is a polylogal text, where at least one text is integrated into another in such a way that the first text can only be reached by way of the other text, without being hierarchically subordinated to it.

In the text six such layers can be found. In Figure 3 I have specified the different levels with the notions actors, relations between actors, place and time of situation, and act.

Figure 3.

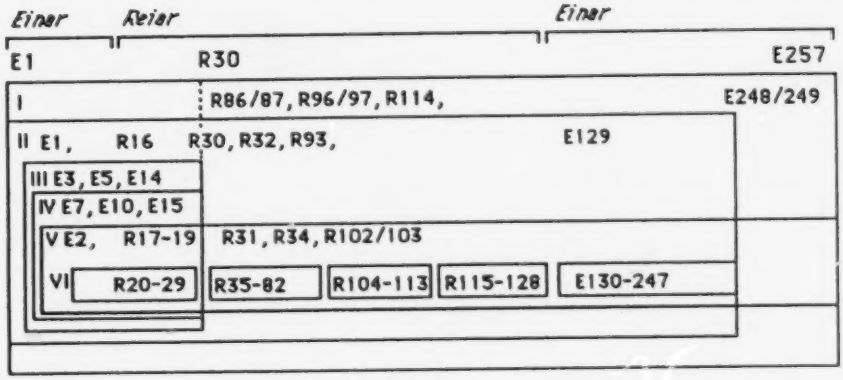
LAYER	ACTORS	ACTOR-RELATIONS	SITUATION PLACE	SITUATION TIME	ACT
I	Einar & Reiar	subordinate to superior	Copenhagen	1771	proposal to the King in public (ideal reader)
II	Einar to Reiar (+real reader)	equal	Opland in Aggerhuus	after last Sunday	conversation
III	The priest to Einar	superior to subordinate	the parsonage	last Sunday	report of conversation
IV	The priest (about T)	-	the parsonage	before last Sunday	report of the reading of letters and papers
V	Einar & Reiar (about T)	subordinate about superior	Opland in Aggerhuus	after last Sunday	narratives
VI	Peasants & officials	subordinate against superior	the county	after the introduction of the special tax in 1762	the peasants in conflict with the officials

What is important in my socio-textological perspective is that this layered structure is a way of solving a norm conflict. In the different layers different norm systems are integrated. For instance, it is possible to locate an indication of a norm system for narratives developed for spoken language at layer VI.

This hypothesis can be confirmed by focusing on the lexico-grammatical structure. The language of layer I is Danish or Danish-like and in rhetorical high style. In this layer the text is directed to the addressee, the king. In layer VI the text is written in dialect only, and its style is typical of spoken informal style. There are specific syntactic constructions located at this level, which are and were at that time very uncommon in written Scandinavian languages, but which seem to be restricted to the spoken variant of those languages.

In Figure 4 I have tried to relate the dialogical structure of the text with the layered structure. It should be noted that most of the text - in fact 76% of it - is located in the innermost layer. Amongst other things this indicates that possibly other addressees than the king were intended as well, for instance Norwegian soldiers stationed in Copenhagen. This explains the many narratives about officials, but also points to the uncertainty that the new situation had created. The public was certainly not a well-defined social group.

Figure 4.



This enables us to draw some conclusions. A new situation, such as the one we have studied, leads to changes and differentiations in a norm system, integration of different norms taken from different kinds of systems and possibly also innovation of norms. In our utterance text, the author had to integrate different norm systems because he had not internalised norms that better suited his purposes. This state of uncertainty could not continue but had to be compensated for by more stable norms. And that is what happened by the end of the century, when new cultural norms for the generating of effective textual utterances in the domain of public opinion were developed. And this new norm system was characteristic of the new class of rulers; the bourgeoisie. Ideologists from this group had a tendency to call this norm system the "natural" one (Rosted, 1810).

6.2. Example 2: The consequences of conflicting goals and communicative functions in a social field

The second conflict type is characterised by being a conflict between different ways of interpreting the purpose (goals and functions) in an institutionalised situation.

The situation I refer to is that of essay writing exams, the end and goal of thirteen years of composition exercises in Norway. In this situation the pupil is supposed to write a short essay as an answer to a question which is more or less specified, depending on the type of task. The pupil can for instance choose a literary analysis. The question will then be specified as "interpret the text x". Or he can choose a type of text analysis which is more pragmatic, and where the text to be analysed is not literary. In this last type of essay, the question will be more specified (Berge, 1988).

The conflicts of a situation like this is well known. The first problem concerns how to decide which is the goal of the social field. The second problem is how to decide the communicative function: The latter problem is a result of the first. And finally there is the problem of how to choose strategies for structuring the text, i.e. the potential conflict of norm systems. Let us take a quick look at these initial problems that pupils are faced with:

The goal of the situation is not clear. I would propose that at least three different goals exist in a situation like this one. Firstly, the concrete goal. That is to write the essay in such a way that one confirms the norm system of the real addressees, the examining commissioners. Secondly, the ideal goal. That is to write in such a way that the essay could be read by a wider audience as a real essay, for instance as an article in a magazine. Thirdly, to write in such a way that one writes according to some more or less specified rules of how a "good" essay should be composed.

The communicative functions of these three situations are not the same. In the first situation the communicative function could be characterised as *instrumental* and *practical*. The function of the second goal would be to present assertives and declarations, i.e. a *cognitive* function. And the function of the third goal would be *poetic*. The purpose of the text would then be to focus on the inner structure of the text, not on the situation in which the text is uttered or on the addressees of the text. If one believes - as I do - that abstract rules of quality cannot be described in universal or ideal terms, there would be an affinity between the first and the third function. Then the goal would be to confirm the aesthetic textual norms of the examining commissioners.

So how do the pupils in a schizophrenic situation like this one in fact compose their essays? If one generalises from quite a large corpus of utterance texts, one will find the following functional structure:

Figure 5.

Linear macrofunctions	**Hierarchical and other linear functions/ Content**
Introduction	1.Summary, Definition or Deleted (the question fills this position)
Main part	2. Exposition ("utgreiing") a. identification and description of a referent b. analysis of the identified referent c. a moral rule (presupposed in the question) is reached 3. Discussion ("dröfting") a. the moral rule is analysed from different points of view b. the moral rule is evaluated
Final part	4. Evaluation ("vurdering") the pupil confirms and vigorously supports the presupposed rule

I would propose that this rather standardised schema is the direct result of the extreme situation that pupils are forced to face. The schema is a norm system developed as a result of this situation. And the schema is institutionalised and naturalised thanks to its strategic position in a ritualistic situation, which the examination of college students in Norway certainly is.

If we take a closer look at a text produced in this situation (Berge, 1986), we shall find that the question in fact functions as a composing model of the utterance texts. In the illustration (Figure 6), the structure of the question is given on the left side and the structure of the essay on the right side. I should mention that this was a text that gained the highest marks in the examination, and the essay was published as being representative of this mark by the school authorities in Norway. The text is therefore an authorised token of the norm system.

Figure 6.

The question	**The essay**
	Introduction: Definition of the referent "uniformity" (monological text I)
	Main part:
Identify tendencies of uniformity in our society	monlogical text II,III,IV,VII
Describe their reasons	microsememes in monological text II,III,IV
Discuss how strong these tendencies are	monological text V,VI
which consequences they may have	monological text VIII,IX,X
	Final part: monological text XI (moral rule: "uniformity of society is bad", i.e. a presupposed rule is confirmed)

If one focuses on the lexico-grammatical level of a text like this, one will find hypercorrect adult-like language, over-representation of certain types of connectors (mostly of the implicative type) and poor harmony between modal operators in the utterances and those facts that the utterances are supposed to refer to.

The conclusion of a study of such a norm conflict situation would be that a potentially liberal situation in an institutional setting leads to the opposite of liberality: the strict standardisation of text structure according to a schematised norm system. This standardisation is of course also caused by the extreme characteristics of

the situation: The fear of not getting a high mark, the shortage of time, and the complete unnaturalness of the whole situation.

7. Conclusion: Two types of normative change

As a conclusion I would like to argue that in these two situations we have witnessed two types of norm conflicts which may lead to two different types of changes in norm systems.

The first situation is typical of a situation which may lead to change in the norm system by *a functionality principle* (or principle of constitutivity) (Berge 1990: 39). In such a situation the norm system is viewed as a means, not an end.

The second situation is typical of a situation where the norm system can be changed only according to *a regulativity principle* (op. cit: 37). Here the norm system can only be changed by *an act of authority*. In such a situation the norm system is not evaluated according to functionality, but only according to correspondence with the norm system. The norm system is thus viewed as an end, not a means. Here the communication is in obvious danger of being reduced to a ritual.

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